

Data Shields Sought To Protect Data Privacy: New software programs helps insurers, agents defend against Web pirates

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Growing fears of identity theft combined with stringent new government regulations on consumer privacy are putting increasing pressure on insurance carriers and producers to make certain that the information they deal with is safe from unauthorized access by those who might use such data illegally.



As a result, technology products that aid in protection of such information are critical to data-intensive industries such as insurance. Such products can help ensure confidentiality online, keep software protection patches up to date, and enable data recovery where hackers and/or viruses have wreaked havoc.

Among the products available to address these concerns are the following:

Protected Browser

OmniTrust Security Systems Inc., a content security provider, recently announced "Protected Browser," which is designed to help protect confidential customer information from unauthorized use.

According to the Mountain View, Calif.-based OmniTrust, Protected Browser prevents employees who have access to confidential information including bank records, credit card numbers and Social Security numbers—such as call center or customer service representatives—from capturing or otherwise misusing this information.

"Thus, consumers can transact business with confidence with vendors that use Protected Browser, even if the vendor has support centers in other countries," the company said.

Using Protected Browser, according to OmniTrust, employees can view customer data on their monitors and input data into the fields, but they cannot print, copy, save or screen-capture that data, thus "eliminating the possibility of mass identity theft and other misappropriation, and ensuring compliance with new privacy laws." OmniTrust noted that widely available "screen scraper" products allow users to copy data off of a screen. "This technology, combined with a red-hot market for customer information among direct marketers, has fueled a massive increase in the sale of confidential customer information," the company said. "Impostors cannot only sell customer information but also use it to obtain credit, merchandise and services in the name of the victim."

According to OmniTrust, Protected Browser can be easily installed by a company's information technology department. No integration with other systems is required, and an administration tool allows users to tag the directories of specific Web pages that require protection.

Pricing for Protected Browser begins at \$80 per seat, with volume discounts offered, the company said. Details are available at www.omnitrust.com.

StillSecure

StillSecure, a Louisville, Colo.-based network security software provider, has announced StillSecure VAM v4.0, which provides software update patch management integration and "one-click remediation."

The company said the new product "manages the entire [software] vulnerability lifecycle from discovery through verified repair, and creates an audit trail of the full process." With integrated patch and remediation management, VAM helps users "systematically resolve and manage the ever-growing risk and liability of vulnerabilities."

VAM v4.0 integrates with Microsoft SMS to automatically apply software patches, which are often designed to close security gaps that may be exploited by hackers to gain unauthorized access.

SMS is Windows NT Server systems management software from Microsoft that is used to distribute software, monitor and analyze network activity, and administer the network. "VAM manages the entire repair process by tracking and logging all SMS repair activity, automating verification scans to confirm the patch has been successfully installed, and creating auditable reports," said StillSecure.

"With the increase in the number of threats and their potential for damage, organizations need to be one step ahead," said Mitchell Ashley, chief technology officer and vice president of engineering at StillSecure. He added that the product provides a "comprehensive" and "proactive" approach to managing such risks "on an enterprise-wide basis."

Pricing begins at \$2,000 for an annual subscription, a company representative said. Further information is available at www.stillsecure.com.

Spybot Search & Destroy

Among the more recent threats to system and data security is spyware, which is software that monitors one's Web surfing habits and sends that information to a Web site—often one that is connected with a commercial enterprise. Such software may be transparently installed on an individual computer with a download of some other program from the Web. Once in place, spyware forwards information to the spyware sender for legitimate marketing purposes, or for illegal purposes.

Since many view such information harvesting as an invasion of their privacy, spyware blockers may provide a solution. One such blocker, available online free of charge from an individual based in Germany, is Spybot Search & Destroy.

Simply put, Search & Destroy scans a computer for a wide variety of known spyware programs, then gives the user the option of deleting those programs. When a user

scans a computer with the product, any spyware detected is noted and color-ranked according to its security threat level (with red entries being the most serious). Search & Destroy also allows users to "inoculate" their computers against invasion by the spyware programs that it lists.

If you run into problems when deleting spyware programs, Search & Destroy provides a recovery option that allows you to undo changes. Users can also search the Web for periodic updates to the program, which can be downloaded at <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html>.

Privacy Bird

Another free software program that seeks to protect privacy is Privacy Bird from AT&T, which automatically searches for privacy policies at every Web site visited, then lets users know whether or not those policies match their own privacy preferences.

According to Basking Ridge, N.J.-based AT&T, the software displays a green bird on the browser's toolbar at Web sites that match the user's preferences, and a red bird at sites that do not match. The program installs into Microsoft Internet Explorer Web browsers and allows for some customization, the company added.

Privacy Bird, said AT&T, allows users to ask for warnings at Web sites that may:

- Sell a user's name and address to other companies without permission.
- Utilize a user's health or medical information for marketing.
- Put a user's name on mailing lists from which users cannot remove themselves.

A beta version of the software can be downloaded at <http://privacybird.com>.

SecurePC

If your system is compromised by a hacker or computer virus, another product can help restore your data, even if you no longer have access to Microsoft Windows icons.

SecurePC 5.0 from FarStone Technology Inc. is backup and recovery software that allows users to "simply click a backup point to roll your system back to a time when the computer last worked." Accessing Windows is not necessary, because the program can be run at the DOS level, said Irvine, Calif.-based FarStone.

The program repairs a personal computer compromised by virus attacks, operating system crashes or failed software installation, the company explained. Users save time and money by not having to rely on a technician to repair such problems. According to FarStone, SecurePC 5.0 also allows users to "burn images" of their hard drives to a CD-RW or DVD-RW to create an auto-recovery CD. "Just insert the CD into the CD drive and the entire PC will be restored back to its previous condition automatically," the company asserted.

SecurePC is priced at \$39.99 and is available at www.farstone.com.